

Hepatitis C and People Who Inject Drugs (PWID)

What is hepatitis C (HCV)? Hepatitis C is a disease caused by the hepatitis C virus (HCV). It primarily affects the liver and over time may damage the liver and the overall health of an individual. The liver is a “non-complaining” organ, so three out of four persons infected with hepatitis C may experience only very mild or no symptoms at all until many years after initial infection. However, they can still spread the disease even if no symptoms are present. If left untreated, hepatitis C may lead to chronic liver disease such as cirrhosis of the liver or liver cancer.

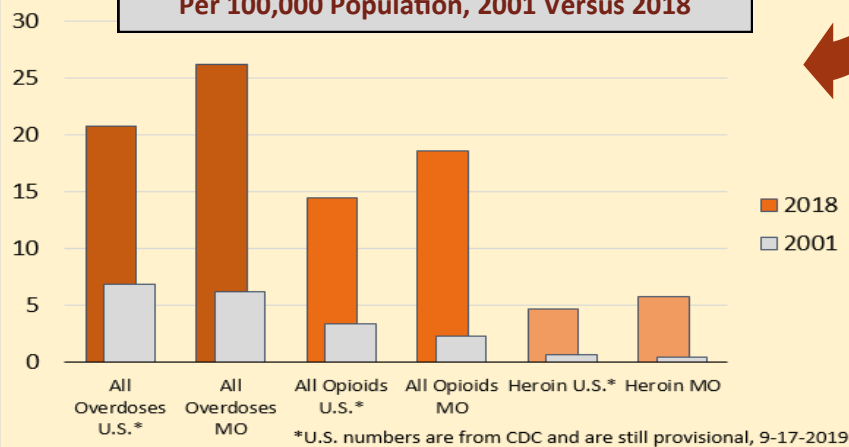
Why such high rates of HCV in PWID? People who inject drugs can acquire and spread hepatitis C through equipment that may be contaminated with blood, such as needles, syringes, water, foil, and cotton. Approximately 32% of persons who engage in injection drug use (IDU) become positive for hepatitis C within one year and that figure increases to 53% within five years. Engaging in behaviors associated with IDU has become the primary risk factor for contracting hepatitis C.

Opioids in Missouri Opioid abuse is a problem in Missouri. There were 8,073 opioid misuse emergency room (ER) visits by Missouri residents in 2017. The total initial cost of opioid misuse ER visits (before insurance negotiations, write-offs, etc.) was \$24,334,813 for 2017. Inpatient hospitalization visits associated with opioid misuse increased 52.9% from 2001 to 2017, going from 5,332 visits to 8,151 visits. From 2015 to 2017 the visits decreased from 9,668 to 8,151. It should be noted that the ICD-9 CM coding standard transitioned to ICD-10 CM in the fourth quarter of 2015, so caution should be used with comparison of counts for years prior to the transition with years after the transition. Opioid-specific crude death rates for 2018 are higher in Missouri, at 18.5 per 100,000 residents, compared to the national overall rate of 14.4. Between 2001 and 2018, the opioid death rate in Missouri increased by more than eight times, from 2.3 to 18.5. From 2001 to 2018, the Missouri heroin death rate grew from 0.4 to 5.7, more than a 14-fold increase, and was almost 23.9% higher than the U.S. rate.

What are the risk factors for HCV?

► The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) has reported that the primary risk factor for hepatitis infection for those under the age of 40 years is related to IDU behaviors. However, there are many other risk factors, such as getting tattoos or piercings in unsafe settings, long term hemodialysis, HIV (human immunodeficiency virus) infection, and being born to a hepatitis C infected mother.

U.S. and Missouri Resident Overdose Death Rates, Per 100,000 Population, 2001 Versus 2018



Chronic Hepatitis C Under 40 Years Old Missouri, 2018

Age	Count	Percent
0-9	14	0.3
10-19	30	0.6
20-29	719	15.4
30-39	975	20.9
Total	1,738	37.2

Why test for HCV? Hepatitis C, if left untreated, is associated with late-stage complications such as liver cirrhosis and hepatocellular cancer. Therefore, screening is important to prevent the spread of hepatitis C and promote clinical interventions before the occurrence of late stages of disease, which are difficult and costly to treat and decrease life expectancy.

Who is infected with HCV? Of the 4,656 chronic hepatitis C cases reported in Missouri in 2018, 1,738 were diagnosed in persons under the age of 40 years. This age group made up 37.2% of all persons diagnosed with chronic hepatitis C in 2018.

An EO/AA employer: Services provided on a nondiscriminatory basis. Hearing- and speech-impaired citizens can dial 711.

2017 Missouri ER Figures: Missouri Department of Health and Senior Services, Bureau of Health Care Analysis and Data Dissemination. Patient Abstract System dataset. Received 09-17-2019.
2018 U.S. Overdose Death Rates: CDC, National Center for Health Statistics. Multiple Cause of Death 1999-2018 on CDC WONDER Online Database, released September 2019. Available at <http://wonder.cdc.gov/mcd-icd10.html>. Accessed 09-16-2019.

Age groups: CDC. “Surveillance for Viral Hepatitis—United States, 2017.” Available at <https://www.cdc.gov/hepatitis/statistics/2017surveillance/index.htm>. Accessed 09-23-2019.

2018 Missouri Hepatitis C Figures: Missouri Department of Health and Senior Services, Bureau of Reportable Disease Informatics. Missouri Health Surveillance Information System (WebSurv). Annual dataset frozen 07-01-2019. All other sources referenced in this fact sheet are fully cited in the *Epidemiologic Profile of Viral Hepatitis in Missouri-2015*, which is available at <http://health.mo.gov/data/hivstdaids/data.php>.
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